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My Desire

W. K. Watson

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W. P. Watson

MY DESIRE

We sang in the shadow of a great organ. I quaked in my shoes as I took the platform, and my knees shook like a stimulated jelly. (p. 76)

MY DESIRE

By

WILLIAM R. WATSON

With a Foreword by

DR. ROBT. C. WALLACE

President of the University of Alberta

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by
WILLIAM R. WATSON

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FOREWORD

The story that is told in this little book will be read with interest by those who are stirred by the challenge of the difficult path. It was no easy road that Mr. Watson had to face: and it is in no spirit of bravado that he looks back over the way by which he has come. His desire is to assist others, hampered like himself, to take their full part in life. The book was written in order to further his plans in this service.

There is a Margaret Ogilvie whose name will live. And there are other great mothers. Am I right in suspecting that the key to this story is a woman whose picture is drawn in a few skilful lines and with a studied restraint? For this, too, I would commend the book to a wide circle of readers.

ROBT. C. WALLACE

To
The Lady with the dimmed blue eyes
still smiling

PREFACE

I finished the manuscript (or more correctly, pedescript) on my twenty-eighth birthday; here it is, "as is". I would love to have taken longer and told you more about Annie Macnish. But every time I wrote about her my eyes became so bleary I could not see. Terrible, won't it be, if scientific theory ever becomes a fact and synthetic babies an actuality. Then there will be no more dear wee mothers to become sentimental over, and Mother's Day, the Florist's Christmas, will be a thing of the past.

A preface seems to be the proper place to clear yourself of many obligations. Let me advise you which ones to do. You want to thank Ronald Martland for keeping the infinitives bound in bonds of holy matrimony, and for his thoughtful guardianship during the growth of the story; both Mr. H. R. Leaver and Mr. A. A. Mackenzie for their kindness in reading the script; and Miss M. L. Martin for her help and advice. It was her inherent jealousy which stopped all associations with "Old Troll" and made the book possible.

Do not forget to thank the Edmonton Male Chorus (you can find them any Wednesday night at practice) for financing the publication; McDermid Studios of Edmonton for the pictures; and Frank D. Turner, artist, for the cover design. And all those

others, too numerous to mention, for their kindness and interest.

I haven't burdened you with dates, for I find it difficult to remember them too.

One further word of advice. Do not lend this book; that is how I got my library.

W. R. Watson.

Edmonton, August, 1932.

P.S.—I forgot to warn you in the first edition never to spell Macnish (the maiden name of my mother) with a large "N." If you ever get an opportunity to ask Annie Macnish how she spells her name, she's sure to say Mac-small n-ish. And quite properly so. For the name is in keeping with the woman, and therefore the "n" must of necessity be a wee one.

April, 1933.

P.P.S.—I have changed my locale from the sunny skies of western Canada. These bleak March days in the East are so merciless that I couldn't think of sending the book to you clad as scantily as it has been. So I persuaded the printer to put a heavy cloth coat on it for the journey. We had some trouble wondering what colors you would like. But we hope the scheme suits you.

40 College Street,
Toronto, Ontario,
March, 1935.

Chapter I.

ANNIE MACNISH.

"Neither the Deil or God would have yae, so yae had to stay wae me." This was my mother's delightfully characteristic way of telling me of her struggle to preserve me for posterity. For you see, I committed the great indiscretion of jumping through the window into this world feet first. I thought it the proper way. I was much too young to know the treachery of glass. An accident resulted; the nerves were cut at my shoulders, and I lost the use of both arms.

Many eminent physicians marvel at the striking resemblance to evolution in miniature which my life affords. My feet rapidly developed to take the place of a much needed pair of hands. My people were surprised at the things I automatically began doing with them. In fact, these things have become so numerous that it is no longer a matter of wonder at home that I shave myself, feed myself and, in a pinch, undress myself with my feet. My earliest recollection, however, of actually using them was in the act of tippling a bottle of soft drinks I had stolen from a cupboard which was within the compass of my reach.

The first seven years of my life must have been very trying to my mother, because they included seven operations under the direction of Sir Robert

Kennedy at the Western Infirmary in Glasgow. How she survived them is beyond my comprehension, for upon two occasions at least she found it difficult to curtail my inquisitiveness to peek beyond the ever open door. One of her greatest anxieties was to get me inside the hospital quietly. But she cunningly purchased my silence with a "double-decker" ice-cream wafer from a near-by candy shop.

A great number of people have praised me for what I have been able to accomplish, but it is to her the credit really belongs. Her ability, tenacity and courage, to say nothing of her infinite resource, much surpass mine. She would never have dared, no matter how much she might have thought it, pen what I have just written, so great is her Scotch reserve.

You should make a point of meeting her. She is four minutes and forty-five seconds tall; but in all other respects she is truly immense. She talks with broad vowels and smashing consonants, writes a hand as bold as the boldest, and can vie with the best wizards of finance. Our family never has been troubled with too much money. I have yet to discover the system she evolved to finance my University education. Perhaps it resulted from the need of comparing the values of the coinage of the two realms when we first reached this country. I well remember her saying how astounded she was at the amount of sugar she could buy for a "shullin".

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen."

Many of England's great come down from the north. His Majesty the King, therefore, lost an excellent Chancellor of the Exchequer when his humble subject Annie Macnish, with her family of seven, emigrated to his dominions beyond the seas. If there had been the least shadow of doubt in the mind of His Majesty, it would have been swept away by the manner in which she has balanced the budget these three years past by receiving paying guests (this term greatly amuses her) at her home until I become self-supporting.

If one must suffer to live then my mother knows life. In the early part of the Great War she lost her soldier boy. This shock greatly impaired her health. During the months that followed, death bade her take company, but she waved him her adieus because she realized I would need her. What greater love?

She is a queer wee soul and has many odd little habits that you must understand to appreciate her fully. Her perversity might "scunner" you sometimes if you didn't, and I am sure you would become quite "crabbit". You would hardly believe it, but she remained in the same city, unknown to me, for four days after leaving me at University. She had said good-bye once and did not want to cause me the emotional discomfort of parting again; she avoided "greetin" the first time, and spared both of us a second chance. You needn't expect any small

talk from her; she'd rather be busying herself about the house although, mind you, she is nobody's "old scudgey". But she does love to play cards. Suggest a game of bridge. You will be sure to win her, but never the game.

I am telling you these things because you must know that she is the cause of all this. So if you have any complaints to make, lay them at her door and not mine. I'm sure she will open it, if only the smallest bit, and tell you she "doesny want any the day".

Chapter II.

HORSES AND HURLS.

My mother has often told me how the doctor, after my miraculous birth, predicted that I was spared to do something great in the world. He reminded her that Christ, Caesar and Lincoln were all born under exceptional circumstances. And see what they have done!

With this delightful send-off into the world and its affairs, it was quite natural that I should want to become a leader among men. So one bright sunny afternoon I led my young brother and sister upon an expedition and explored the wonders of a feather cushion. The result was at once mysterious and triumphant. The room became literally covered with beautifully light and fluffy feathers. I had liberated them from bondage; but my triumph was short-lived. On mother's home-coming I was banished to the dark room. On top of that I was given just cause forever to remember this ambitious escapade, for she had done her work so thoroughly that, during those dark hours, I found it quite impossible to sit at ease, and was forced to spend my time pacing the floor, retributive and penitent.

I must confess that the storehouse of my childhood memories is not so abundantly stocked as would seem to be the case with most autobiographers. The peculiar things I can do, however, with my feet

(you would be vastly amused yourself if you saw me writing this now) have always appealed to the theatrical side of people's natures, and as far back as I can remember I have been, quite unconsciously, the centre of attraction among friends. My father often entertained his guests by showing them the ease with which I could wrap my legs about my neck, just like that; or he would have me fill and light a small clay pipe, part of a miniature smoking-set he had brought me from the Edinburgh Exhibition. Once, too, I recall running away from home only to be found by our dear old Dr. Gilmour. He drove up in an ominous black cab, which looked terribly dark and forbidding inside. He threatened to tell my mother, but I bought him off and pledged him to secrecy by showing him how to recover a penny he had thrown to me from the window. One day in the beautiful country side near our home in Radnor Park, Granny Donnelly (Doanelly, please), who sold the most delicious sweets from her white-washed cottage on the road side, gave me a large slab of toffee, so moved was she by the tragedy of my young life.

At the hospital I immediately won the hearts of the ladies, and particularly that of the matron, who labelled me "Hands Off" by dressing me in a red uniform with poke hat to match. The only people I found it impossible to inveigle were the doctors. I screamed blue murder every time they placed me upon the rolling bed to take me to the

operating room. But that did not prevent them covering my face with sickly smelling cloths, and then haunting me to sleep by detaching their great voices from their bodies and making them sound so hollow and cavernous.

Weary of so many operations, I decided at the tender age of seven to leave for Canada, and persuaded my folks to come with me. It was not long before I had struck a lasting acquaintance with the captain and his crew. We roamed the seven seas, wild pirates looking for plunder, at least for as long a time as I could remain up deck and my meals would remain down. But one morning I arrived on deck to find that I had "sold short" a large block of *Mal de Mer* Common. This took the upward trend, and finally left me bankrupt by becoming watered stock. Disgraced and humiliated, I only made one other public appearance in the dining-room, where I again proved myself quite unseaworthy, and the captain sentenced me to my bunk for the rest of the voyage.

Having created such a vast patronage during my short stay in Scotland, you can imagine my consternation when the driver of the Bakery wagon, at Macleod, Alberta, passed me by without the slightest recognition. I had asked him for a "hur-r-rl," and I was determined to get it. Mustering all my art and guile together in one last effort, I met him on his next round and, standing on one leg, doffed my cap with the other foot. It worked.

I had won him. He drew his "cuddy" to a sudden stop and immediately joined my large following of admirers. From then on I was privileged to view the little town of Macleod from the window of a Bakery van. He even allowed me to "foot-le" the reins, and I guided the destiny of the gentle "horse", a much more dignified term than "cuddy", I was told, from one door to another. I drank in every philosophic word of this great servant of the people. He told me when in Rome to do as the Romans do and talk English. This wisdom could not be ignored; from then on I always asked him for a ride, not a hurl, and please may I drive your horse. My Canadian Education had begun.

ANNIE MAC–small N–ISH

Great occasions these, when Annie Macnish looks at you with her smiling bonnie blue eyes.

Chapter III.

WISDOM AND STATURE.

You must not think for one moment that Macleod's only distinction lies in the fact that it was my home for the next thirteen years. The town itself is pitched upon the apex of a large rock pile and is blown clean by a sweeping westerly. Two narrow steel ribbons pierce it like a dagger from the north and disappear into the blue horizon of the east. The Old Man River steals sleepily by on one side, unnoticed. Miles of flowing grain stretch away in every direction, at least in those years when God is good and sends the rain. It was here the Royal Canadian Mounted Police made one of their first permanent locations in Alberta, and for many years their scarlet uniform broke the monotony of the dun landscape. Here, too, the Blood and Peigan Indians came to spend their treaty money. These were gala days for the youngsters, who laughed gleefully at the nitchies squatted on the sidewalks and in the shop entrances bundled in their large blankets; it was a source of amusement to hear them "ugh-ughing" among themselves. Very few western towns could ever boast such a picturesque worthy as old Doodney. He used to hide his withered red skin beneath a gaudy feather hat, and a black tailored suit girded tightly around the middle by a bizarre sash. He would hobble from

door to door, half blinded by the smoke of many teepee fires, begging favours from the housewives. Rumours were numerous about this quaint old Cree, but the most romantic, and therefore the most believable one to us, was that he had been captured by the Bloods and liberated upon the coming of the white man. But the Mounties were taken away; the Indians found another place to spend their money; and old Doodney died. So that with my departure Macleod became just another "Western", with its red station, tall elevators and long single main street.

Entrusted to the brisk atmosphere and the glorious Sun of this little western town, I grew "in wisdom and stature." My chums and I often stole away to the banks of the river to lie sprawled on our backs watching the clear sky dotted by large white clouds. Or we would roam the distant cut-banks exploring the hidden recesses of some old cave. Around these places we built legends of war which we enacted hundreds of times with our bows and arrows, sling-shots and catapults. When winter came we strained every fibre of our sleds in the wild dashes down the hills, the crisp wind whipping our cheeks to rosiness.

In all these adventures I tried to keep pace with the others and to do exactly as they did; sometimes with very disastrous results. Once we had to wade a new fork of the river, created by the spring floods, in order to reach one of our old hideaways among the willows. We had undressed for the occasion, although the water at its deepest point never came

above our knees. I was foolish enough to look down in transit, and became so dizzy that I fell and began "Rolling Down to Rio" like an otter. Not versed in aquatic technic, I timed my yells for help so poorly that they always came while I was under water. These supplications were uselessly drowned in the large mouthfuls that gushed in. I believe I was preparing for my third gush when someone lifted me to my feet and helped me to the bank.

I never went near running water again for a long time, although I often cooled my body in the Muskrat, a small slough nestled away among trees at the end of a path along which cactus berries and choke cherries were abundant. But I did learn to swim, and I'm going to tell you about it now while we are on the subject, even at the expense of confusing you a little by using place names other than Macleod. I was nineteen at the time, and we had already moved to Edmonton.

My determination to learn to swim arose out of a peculiar circumstance. I had been invited to spend a week at Gull Lake with friends. My advance notices were not at all pleasing to my host's mother, whom I did not know. She expected to find me spoiled. You see, she was ignorant of Annie Macnish's impartial parenthood. I so upset her preconceived ideas that we became lasting friends, and she took such a motherly interest in me that I was forbidden "ever to go out in that dinghy again." But I had tasted the joys of sailing. I was wild with excitement as we had split wave after wave

in that mad rush before the wind. It was exhilarating to have the spray dash itself defiantly in my face. Ecstatically thrilled, I cared little during those moments whether I could swim or not. Even if I had cared, I am sure R.L.S. would have shamed me out of it.

> "The love of Life and the fear of Death are two famous phrases that grow harder to understand the more we think about them. It is a well-known fact that an immense proportion of boat accidents would never happen if people held the sheet in their hands instead of making it fast; and yet, unless it be some martinet of a professional mariner or some landsman with shattered nerves, every one of God's creatures makes it fast. A strange instance of man's unconcern and brazen boldness in the face of death."

I came back to the city eager to sweep away the obstacle to such a pastime. In one month after date I was able to swim quite decently after practising two hours daily in the Y.M.C.A. tank. The instructor there taught me to swim on my back and belly and on one side and then the other. This became quite easy after I had acquired the primary requisite of confidence; to *just* lie in the water and kick. I was soon able to steam up and down the pool, boiling the water like a turbine. The real test, however, came in learning to dive. In my first immersion of this nature all my reserve courage was drawn upon. He told me to get down on my knees at the side of the pool. What a queer time to ask for such a posture. Was it really as bad as all that! I must have thought so, for I was momentarily seized with a desire to content myself by

I think you would be vastly amused if you saw me writing this now. To make sure, I am enclosing this picture. (p. 16)

trusting in God and keeping my body dry. Finally I shut my eyes and fell forward, down, down and down. It felt like hours and a long journey before I came up. But the worst was over. I had burned one more bridge behind me.

Personal remarks from children never worry me. These little folks are all so natural and spontaneously innocent. Their frankness and naïveté is indeed refreshing. On most occasions I go them one better with some horribly grotesque reply. Once at least, however, I was left speechless. My gallant young victor was a boy who had been left alone with me in the pool on one of the days I have just told you about. He stood there in all his nudity, feet far apart and arms akimbo, watching me swim. And then, like a bolt from the blue he said, "You *are* a freak, aren't you?"

And now that that is over with, let us go back to Macleod and to mad youth with its desire for expression in diversified sports.

I have always been passionately fond of horseback riding. To satisfy this passion I cultivated the acquaintance of a young girl whose father owned a lot of good saddle ponies and a ranch flowing with biscuits and buttermilk. It was situated in the elbow of a cut-bank which rises away from Willow Creek. For years this was the focal point of some very exciting rides. On most of them I insisted upon a horse to myself. If you have ever ridden a cayuse or a cow-horse, you must know how easily

they are guided by a swing of the body and the grip of the knees. At any rate, the allurement of the sport outweighed reason and banished fear. I generally gave the horse his head, trusting that the crowd instinct applied to it and that my charge would follow the rest.

In this manner we were galloping along the upper slope one Saturday afternoon when I felt myself slipping to one side. My first impression was that the horse had contracted every muscle of his carcass to free himself from a monstrous fly. They often do that, you know. But as it continued I tried to right myself until matters got beyond my power and the saddle rolled under. I had the presence of mind, thank Heaven, to withdraw my feet from the stirrups; but in my precipitous descent I received a kick in the back which completely winded me. My friend Hester rushed back to find me lying huddled on the ground. The gasping look of despair I gave her must have frightened the poor girl. In her anguish she yelled down at me, "Don't die, Bill! Don't die!" The ludicrousness of it immediately struck me, for I was absolutely powerless at that moment to do anything, but when I finally did regain normal breathing I almost laughed myself back into another convulsive state.

My boldness was dampened momentarily, and I waived my independence by riding double for some time afterwards. Even under these conditions I was destined for another fall. It came when our little

brown pony tripped in a hole and threw both of us into the air. I plunged head first into a pile of ashes, and arose grazed from head to foot.

My mother was always "fear-r-rt" I would get hurt; my adventures with an equine, therefore, were carried on quite stealthily. You can imagine the little white lies that were needed to explain these scratches away, and I hope you will never be heartless enough to tell her what I have just told you.

By this time I had amassed a huge fortune painting show-cards, selling bottles, delivering papers and cutting lawns. It amounted to twenty-five dollars in Canadian currency. I motored out to the Indian Reserve to transact my first big business deal. A large number were attracted here every year by the sale of stray horses from the range. The men leaned lazily against the corral, or sat hunched on its top spar. A complete understanding existed between them and the auctioneer, for a sagacious nod of the head was sufficient to make a purchase. I tried this once, but I lost my first choice. I made more sure of the second one by speaking up. My voice scared the others off, and the horse was knocked down to me for twenty dollars.

It took a great deal of water and many patient hours with the clippers to make a first-class job of the old grey. But we raised him from the ordinary run of horseflesh by christening him Vampa. Where the word came from I don't know, although I have

a suspicion that it was a corruption of the phrase "Wild Bull of the Pampas," a headliner in the daily newspapers about this time.

Vampa was responsible for carrying me beyond the immediate neighborhood of Willow Creek. I am afraid our relationship wasn't the happiest, and it was brought to a close after I unfortunately broke my arm. I was dismounting from the beast when I slipped on a rock. The impact that followed proved disastrous and, never being freely forgiving, I sought my revenge by selling him for an amount equivalent to my capital investment. But sentimental attachments cannot be severed immediately. I always guarded his reputation by telling only part of the truth in relating the accident. It went on record as happening from purely impersonal causes. That is to say, I had fallen on a stone.

My love for horses was only eclipsed by that for dogs. Even if this had not been the case my Scotch ancestry would have arisen in one voice within me to make me love Laddy more, because he cost me less. He came to me as a woolly-barrelled pup from a respectable home one hundred miles away, and boasted a fine lineage of blunt-nosed collies steeped in the art of sheepherding. He handed me his credentials in the form of a pedigree at the door before he entered. A pedigree meant only one thing for me after that, and when my Grade VIII teacher asked me to define it pande-

monium broke loose when I told him that it was proof a dog was a thoroughbred.

During his upbringing I experienced the heart-aches and worries that came of teaching him some of the primary and simple conventions of the modern home. He was slow to apply the adage that there is time and place for everything, and in spite of his blue blood I was forced to find "ludgings" for him outside.

People are drawn close to each other in time of trouble. I stayed awake nights making mental notes of the dimensions of the kennel; and why not? Hadn't MacAdam, another great Scot, built his roads in bed. The financing of the enterprise was the greatest stumbling block, until Dad not only found the material for me, but took out the contract to build it.

The dog never forgot this kindness, and grew strong and as quickly as possible. He was present at the buying of the harness and shafts, and subsequently showed his approval by pulling me with a willingness anywhere, irrespective of season or time. In fact, he taught me the true meaning of altruism, for he assisted me in raising the funds to buy the old grey. I am sure he knew that no man could be faithful to two loves at one time.

We became bosom pals. One night I answered his bark and admitted him to the kitchen. He was not in long before he stiffened out and his back began to hump in the middle; he walked like one on

stilts. He placed his head on my lap and looked up at me with those large brown eyes full of pain. For the life of me I could not tell what was wrong. My alarm grew when he fell helpless on the floor. I called our next door neighbour, who knew sheep-dogs. Nothing could be done. My poor dog had been poisoned and soon died. We wrapped him in sacks and gave him a burial that befitted his ilk. We bore him in the wagon he had once pulled and laid him deep, far out on the blue bald prairie.

I missed him terribly and tried to grieve in silence. The separation was soon too much for me. I locked myself in the bathroom, and sitting down on the most likely place, wept bitter tears.

The neighbour who tried to save my dog was a big, good-hearted Irishman. His face was grim and hardened and polished to a shiny tan by years of fighting the elements. In a long gruelling combat with nature he wrested his farm from the wilderness. His philosophies were of the most practical sort, and led him to change from wheat farming to sheep raising to get two crops, the wool and the lambs, instead of one within the space of each twelve months. The years of penury had left an indelible stamp on this hardy pioneer, and he grew cautious and canny with his money. Such common sense was quickly mistaken for parsimony by the townspeople, and it was universally recognized that this Old Timer "sure squeezed his pennies"; "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," and His Majesty

King George V must have suffered many a headache when pinched between his strong fingers. I liked the old boy because he had a great sense of humor and a lawn at his town place that had to be cut once a week. He stood over six feet and was as broad as he was long. Every time he laughed this massive bulk shook from head to foot, his stomach becoming a sliding scale of merriment. He had a great way with the women, and especially Annie Macnish. It was he who persuaded her to let me learn to skate, and you know how stubborn a woman can become when she once makes up her mind against anything. This only made his victory the greater, and he finally won her to the cause by his seal of endorsement in the form of a new pair of skates. This expression of good faith was too much. The instruments were there and could not go idle. I began another conquest.

I hugged the side of the rink during those initial tryouts. I was, quite naturally, timid and frightened; I had no faith in being poised above two narrow strips of steel. I soon found that I had a good sense of balance, and rarely hurt myself. I anticipated most falls by sitting down on the ice. Skating gave me another outlet for my feelings, and before long I found myself sweeping the corners at a fast clip to the crack-swish-crackle of the ice below.

It was lucky for me that I did master this winter pastime, for it enabled me to participate in a

hockey game years later at the University of Alberta which is bound to go down in history. It was unique in its originality and gratifying in its results. It arose out of a dispute among the Law classes as to the respective abilities of each. The year to which I belonged contended its superiority. We chose trial by combat in the form of a three-sided hockey game to substantiate our claims. The challenge was accepted by the other two years. Three goals were placed upon the ice to form an equilateral triangle. The side having the least number of goals scored against it would emerge the winner; no goal would count if the puck passed over the blue line off the ice. I was entrusted with guarding the net. Having no stick, I kicked the pucks out of the danger zone with my feet. It became evident as the game progressed that our contentions had been sound. Our opponents, therefore, in one mad effort to reduce our lead, combined forces. In the stress of the moments that followed, my agility stood me in good stead; I did the splits in front of the goal mouth and repulsed this last-minute attack. After the smoke of battle had cleared away and the excitement of the contest had subsided, we found ourselves winners by a tidy margin.

Sport helps me get the most out of life. "I love life. I want to live." In fact, I have always made it a point to pack as much as possible into the short span of years at my disposal. "The Bird of Time has but a little way to flutter," and I am so busy

I was soon able to steam up and down the pool, boiling the water like a turbine. (p. 22)

filling every "minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run" I find no spare moments to brood over "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." If what I believe can aspire to the greatness of the word, then my philosophy is essentially that of "To-day".

> Look to this day!
> For it is Life, the very life of Life.
> In its brief course lie all the
> Verities and realities of your Existence;
> The Bliss of Growth,
> The Glory of Action,
> The splendour of Beauty;
> For Yesterday is but a dream,
> And To-morrow is only a Vision;
> But To-day well lived makes
> Every Yesterday a Dream of Happiness
> And every To-morrow a Vision of Hope.
> Look well therefore to this Day!

This philosophy is an accretion of my experiences; but I hope you may benefit by reading it. "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." Remember that your mind is a garden and you are the only gardener who can keep down the weeds that are bound to find root there. Never let your unhappy lot get the better of you. It, like a cloud passing across the sun, will cast a gloom much greater than its own dimensions. If you must go into a slump about things in general, console yourself that you are better off than many another. Go out and find a rainstorm; bare your face to its pelting downpour and wash your cares away. Then, for the love of all that is in you, man, "Laugh", *and if you must*, "Sing".

Chapter IV.

THE RISE AND FALL.

A consciousness of my difference to other people grew with advancing years. My condition, however, was so accepted in the community life of Macleod with its fifteen hundred souls that I was passed by unnoticed; it was left for the people of Edmonton, a city of seventy-five thousand, to bring my self-conscious side into being. My first impulse on arousing so much interest on its streets was to hide myself away forever. I quickly realized the silliness of this attitude, and my embarrassment soon became a thing of the past. I have since then turned their inquisitiveness to my own advantage. It has now become a source of amusement to me to watch the clumsiness of passers-by trying to hide their obvious eagerness to bring the attention of their friend to something only they themselves could possibly have discovered. I chuckle at the little whispered asides about "that man" which lose themselves in the distance behind me. This undue attention has often been a cause of great concern to my immediate friends, but was completely misinterpreted by one. I was showing a Macleodite the city for the first time. Naturally she thought I would be treated here as I was in her small town back home. After numerous glances had been cast our way, she said, "Isn't it strange how quickly these people detect a stranger?"

The realization of this difference gave rise to a definite determination to equip myself as well as possible mentally. I spent less time with my chums. I studied assiduously and read much; I remember the great fascination Scott held for me. Desiring to study art more fully than the school curriculum permitted, I became the pupil of the late Mrs. O. C. Edwards, whose pictures were often hung on the line at the Ottawa Exhibition. We studied from the round; and I sat in the same ring on the carpet at every lesson so as to see the object from the same distance. She taught me some of the fine points of perspective. It was shortly after this that I entered every possible class of drawing competition at our local fair and won several prizes; one, I remember, was a "special" for the excellence of a map of the world I had made. When the judges learned that these entries had been done by me they grouped them around a show-card which read,

This work was done
by
Wm. Watson,
With his feet and not his hands.

I was contemplating the blatant redundancy of the poster when a jolly Irish woman, with rosy cheeks and straggly hair, drew up. The printed word meant nothing to her. "Begorra and I don't belaive it," she said. She had no doubt become another doubting Thomas from reading too many daily newspapers. I immediately entered into the

spirit of the thing and, turning to her, replied, "Neither do I."

But wait a minute! This seems to me to be overdoing the author's license of magic transposition. Why didn't you stop me? Here I am, overcoming the elements of space and time, dropping you on Macleod one moment and taking you to Edmonton, some three hundred miles away, the next; telling you anecdotes for fear you might be ready to nod just about now, and making myself all grown up when I'm really quite small at this point of the story. For this chapter is dedicated to my school days.

How teachers intimate for the first time the various methods and secret signs one must use to leave the room will always be shrouded in mystery to me. I was unable to use the recognized "index finger" system; but by some means I came to know that a peculiarly significant nod would exempt me —and with an *Aide-de-camp*. The days in Grade I were so long, for I sat there doing nothing, that I am afraid I prevailed upon the teacher's modesty, and under a cloak of gross deceit relieved the monotony of those weary days chatting with my little friend in some cool corner of the basement below.

Grade II saw my descent. I adapted myself as best I could to conditions and sat on the floor. There, on a small flat board desk, I learned to write with my feet. My right shoe and sock were given

Sport helps me get the most out of life. (p. 30)

added wear and tear for, until I left Grade XII, they were removed and replaced eight times daily. Grade II does not remain memorable to me because of this inglorious descent, but more on account of my *affaire de coeur* on Valentine's Day. I was such a recognized misogynist that no one made any material manifestation of affection for me. The teacher was overcome with this appalling state of affairs and had to leave the room. She returned shortly with a delightful little love-token and all for me. But the glue was so wet that my amulet fell to pieces in my foot.

From this ground school I took short hazardous flights into the realms of reason and fancy. I skipped Grade III and Grade VII. I almost had a terrible crash landing in Grade V. You who have been to school must know that the wonder of the looking-glass is upon you in this grade; especially its delightful dancing sunbeams which brighten the whole school-room. It even becomes more fascinating with the prohibitive features involved: the young man in possession is strapped. I, like all the others, suffered from a "mirror complex" and delighted in reflecting it upon the ceiling whenever sunlight chanced my way. By a strange stroke of fate the teacher discovered it.

I gave her ample opportunity to count ten and change her mind, for I approached her at recess with both feet dressed. She took my shoe and stocking off and strapped me twenty-five times on

the sole of the foot. This singular news spread like wildfire, and many an indignant mother wanted Annie Macnish to have the teacher dismissed. With all the impartiality of a High Court judge she reviewed the facts dispassionately, found me culpable, with not a tittle of evidence in my favour, and refused to take action.

In High School I became a permanent floor fixture, for I had a new desk made that would house all my books in shelves before me, to obviate bobbing up and down. With the help of this brainchild, a product of my own imagination, I won the Grade XII prize given for the highest standing in the preliminary finals.

The Macleod Chapter *of* the Imperial Order *of* the Daughters *of* the Empire did its little bit to foster world peace by stimulating competition in the school. Every year they gave these prizes to the one with the highest standing in each grade. It was always an occasion for the proud mothers and fathers and all the dignitaries of the city to turn out on their best behavior. The town milliner and the town marceller and the town baker and the town bookseller looked forward to it with unusual interest. So did all the other little Johnnies not so proud, for they were at least assured a dish of ice-cream for their patience in sitting the ceremony through; even if the Chapter had to buy cheaper book-bindings to do it. It was the one day that the school secretary could assert his predominance

upon the people. He had waited years to show his real oratorical capabilities. His patience was rewarded when he reached my name. Under the blushing embarrassment caused by his eulogy I went forward for my book. He placed it under my right arm, which, you must have noticed from the pictures, has a providential bow in it, just made for such occasions as these—great occasions when Annie Macnish looks at you with her smiling bonnie blue eyes dimmed with tears of joy.

The school secretary had exposed me. There was only one thing now for me to do. I left town that fall.

Chapter V.

UNIVERSITY.

"'What a curious feeling!' said Alice. 'I must be shutting up like a telescope.'

And so it was indeed: she was now only ten inches high . . . "

Alice and I were *in pari delicto* when I entered my wonderland of massive University Buildings with their colossal pillars, high ceilings and long halls, where even a whisper came back to hit you in the nape of the neck. I felt utterly bewildered in this labyrinth of offices and lecture rooms.

My feeling of insignificance reached its nadir with my first lecture. The term was well under way before I came to University. My arrival was delayed until three young men, staying at one of the affiliated Colleges of the Methodist Church, did a magnificently sporting thing and volunteered to look after me "sight unseen." The late Mr. Race, Registrar at the University, felt that I had missed enough lectures, and dropped me into A-212 after the lecture had commenced. A voice stopped and two eyes suspended above a large black robe peered at me over horn-rimmed glasses and froze me to the spot. It began again:

"What is your name?"

"Watson."

I studied Art and learned some of the fine points of perspective. (p. 33)

"I haven't it in my register."

"Just arrived."

"Come to my office afterwards."

I wondered how I could ever climb up on the nearest chair, for I was "now only ten inches high." This shrunken feeling had a very telling effect, and for some weeks I experienced a peculiar sensation at the pit of my stomach which, I am sure, a bowl of Annie Macnish's broth would have cured.

Too frightened to disobey, I arrived at Professor Burt's office to find to my amazement that he was really human and liked a cup of tea, and wouldn't I come over for one Sundays between four and seven. My visits to his home were frequent. His children and I became true pals. They conferred upon me the Order of Royalty, and I was made the King of the Fairies. The King can do no wrong, and the most outlandish and unconventional things were expected of me; to exempt myself, unexcused, from the gathering for a rowdy romp in the nursery directly above, or to preside over a fairy ring on the lawn, while they danced before me. Having the interests of my subjects at heart, I advised Arthur, aged three, to refrain from using his bow and arrows in the house and wait until we got outside, where he could shoot at the bull's eye. All the wisdom of a Solomon could not have met his reply.

"But, Sire," he said, "what if the bull should move."

I later came to realize that the great gift which the University can bestow is the possibility of personal contact with men such as these: widely read and with extensive intellectual interests. You will find no two professors alike. One may strive after oratorical effect with a too constant use of the rhetorical question, and leave you pondering Queen Elizabeth's discomfort riding on the horns of a dilemma; or another may fidget his way through a lecture jumping from one foot to another to bridge the gap between classical antiquity and modern civilization. Some just smile and others don't. In spite of such little idiosyncrasies many of them have one thing in common: they invest their subjects with their magnetic personalities, and the size of the University is, quite happily, such as not to smother their personal influence.

On my first night at University, Eric Stuart, President of the Sophomore Class, the motto of which was "To delight in dwarfing Freshmen even further", came to my digs and advised me that I would be exempted from Initiation. This came as a blow to me; I never wanted to be singularized. I wanted to wear the bib and the green and gold Eton cap tied round the chin with ribbons of the same color, like the rest of the freshmen; to lose my individuality in a number; to have a coffin-shaped copy of directions tacked up on my door, and to learn civility to Sophomores with "yes, sir" and "no, sir" in order to know what to expect of fresh-

men the following year—in short, to create those lasting friendships that arise out of a state of common tribulation.

Mr. Stuart told me there was no objection to my becoming a spiritual participant. That same night I did. I was awakened by the shouts of Sophomores as they banged each coffin-marked door. This was followed by the deadened sound of bare feet in the halls. From my window I could see a little group of shivering livid ghosts, huddled together in their pyjamas waiting to be offered to the up-tailed dragon. As I looked at them I thought of an interpolated version of a message to Moses. "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months, the first month of the year to you. . . ." We "shall take blood and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door posts . . ." of your rooms, for we "shall pass through the land this night . . . and against all will execute judgment."

The College at which I stayed was once a Soldiers' Hospital. Its fire escapes were of the cylindrical shape with a spiral runway inside. Into these monsters of iniquity all freshmen were fed. Each freshman gathered momentum as he slid down the shutes, and the friction became so great that the Sophomores felt duty bound to pour in ice-cold water at each floor to prevent all possibility of instantaneous combustion. For the next hour these

big black fiends belched and spewed their drenched and bedraggled victims.

The actual initiation ceremony took place some days later. I passed through the "black hole" by stepping over rows and rows of freshmen lying in their pyjamas, blindfolded, waiting for their numbers to be called. I followed one of these poor devils, who walked silently, groping and afraid, up into the Chamber of Horrors. Here before a tribunal of five Sophomores he was charged with some absurd offense, and after pleading "Guilty" or "Not guilty" was immediately convicted and sentenced to walk the gang plank. He fell fathoms into a receiving blanket below. After this, he had to crawl along a ladder (hundreds of feet from the ground), assisted by two Sophomores, who continually paddled his bottom. He was then revived by a shot of electricity in the stomach, the abdominal muscles reacting to an astonishing degree, and swung wildly in mid-air from a trapeze. Thus the Sophomores exploited the field of mental suggestion with some applied psychology. One experiment was particularly effective. My friend's eyes were unbandaged for the first time, and he was shown a slab of liver crawling with flies. A piece was being cut for him as the blindfold was replaced, and he was forced to eat some gelatin with raisins in it. It was interesting data that even the most delicate stomach withstood the test. As a final ordeal, he

was cooled off in a large tank of water and then liberated to enjoy Field Day.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new." You who plan coming to the University can regain confidence. This healthy virile initiation has gone forever, and another has taken its place, permeated with the give-me-your-little-hand-sonny spirit.

I also saw the last "Med. Day". "Med. Day" was set apart each year by Medical and Engineering students to satisfy an age-old feud of contended supremacy, It began early in the morning and continued for hours. The object of each faculty was to defend its own flag, and both sides pursued the animated conquest amid the laughter of the unsuspecting Art students, who always came out the see the grand mêlee. Suddenly the Meds and Engineers turned on the spectators. It was part of a preconcerted stratagem to insure the surprise and sartorial destruction of the onlookers. It was a Slaughter of the Innocents. The amazed Art students had no time to think or act. Meds and Engineers came leaping down upon them, a dense throng of combatants, yelling at the height of their voices and stirring themselves to action with their wild "Zip" song:

> Three Zips and they're off!
> To Hell with the Toffs.
> Hip, hip, hurray,
> They're buttonless today.

Rushing and striking, tripping their adversaries or hurling them to the ground, they began the heart-

less massacre, divesting every man of his buttons and waving pieces of stolen belts above their heads. Many a humiliated student fled the field, his trousers pulled up tightly around him and puckered and bunched in his clenched fist. On this occasion I was thankful for my continued right of spiritual participation. Even in the sanctity of their own beloved Arts Building they were not safe. The joined forces came pouring in, a wild and tumultuous throng, and the slaughter continued without mercy until all was a carnage of buttons and a confusion of cut belts. The Building began pouring its depleted victims from the doors and windows; one unfortunate finding the distance too great had to hang on to the window ledge with both hands, flying his white flag of truce behind him. The question of indecent exposure immediately arose, but since the young man was under a common law obligation to preserve his body for the king, he was justified in using both hands to avoid the fatal fall, even though in so doing he had dishonored this great pacifist institution by affiliating himself with that militaristic organization—the Hatchway Army.

Field Day always comes early in the term and gives every young athlete a chance to prove his right to represent the University at the Inter-Collegiate Meets. Here was something on a scale I had never seen before; large stadium, race track and jumping pit. I was thrilled with the sprints,

the javelin throw and the shot put; but the grace of the human body in the act of clearing the hurdles completely enraptured me. It has since that day remained the most beautiful thing in sport for me. As the elimination contests proceeded, the team and class spirit, which engulfs every student before long, surprised me; competitor and bystander pulled for his faculty to win. It was a glorious finish to two weeks of thrilling and new experiences. Now there was work to be done; for strangely enough, all the sugary vaporizing of authors notwithstanding, University is something more than a commercialized Rugby Stadium.

The lecture system beset me with difficulties. I had brought my floor desk with me, thinking I would continue to do as I had done in the past. But it would have been an impossibility to lug it from one lecture room to another, for the intervals between lectures, which are often held in different buildings, are small. The inconveniences of taking my shoe off became apparent, and I abandoned any thoughts of taking notes in class. I only used my desk at examination time. On examinations, which I wrote apart from classmates, I was allowed only fifteen minutes more per hour than they were. This request was induced not from any feeling of near equality with them, but from a commonly shared desire to finish the ordeal as soon as possible.

I was forced to rely upon my memory; it proved a great mental training. By the end of a few

months I found myself able to carry the pith and substance of three lectures, an average morning's work, in my mind at once, and copy it down for myself in my room later.

The study of law, however, did not lend itself to this memory system. Legal maxims cannot be left to the hazards of memory. Even if I had been able to remember the legal principles, I would have had no time to copy them down, for I had to spend many hours making synopses of cases in preparation for the lectures. I was therefore forced to compromise. Others willingly copied in marginalia for me during the lecture and loaned me their notes, which I later had typed. I did not feel satisfied with this arrangement.

To restore my peace of mind I learned to write with my mouth. It seemed hopeless at first. In practising the Zaner Method of *Handwriting* my throat became coated with shavings from the pencil and the exercise caused me repeated nose bleeds. But after months of effort I brought my muscles under control. My mouth writing became steady and very legible. I acquired a good rate of speed. It became less taxing on me physically, and when I returned to University in the fall I took notes in class, and even wrote my examinations this way.

I spent five years at the University. During that time my mind underwent a metamorphosis. The early mental transformation was the most violent, for my previous education had been, like that of so

It was a happy day for my toes when they were able to sit up at table with the rest of the family. (p. 80)

many students, so narrow and restricted that I found it difficult to retain a balance with these new vistas of thought opening suddenly before me. The sanity of Greek Philosophy of Fifth Century Athens, the boldness of the Historians in disputing the authenticity of old writing, the common sense of Huxley's Lay Sermons and the inference of Anatole France's Procurator of Judea nearly drove me off at a tangent. I delighted, in spite of these cataclysmic changes, in the privilege of consorting with the works of these masters. The more I learned, the better I realized the less I knew.

As I became more confident in my opinions I enjoyed the healthy discussions of the University Common Room, where battles are fought and won and political issues settled expeditiously. The free life of the residences offered a mental stimulus equivalent to any class-room routine. Here the wildest heresies can be expressed without fear of social censure. My manner of speech and dress underwent a change. I was rapidly becoming a sophisticated young man. My mind began to soar into the realms of right and wrong.

Law, which teaches a man to think sanely and logically, if nothing else, brought me back to earth. I began walking with both feet on the ground, learning where to "draw the line" and that I could not "blow both hot and cold." The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council came within the orbit of my interest. I often flagged my weary mind

with the delightful judgment of these distinguished judges. You have only to read them to realize that judges are born and not made (politically).

Friendships are built up at University and last through life probably because of the affinity that exists between graduates, or the polarity of thought and ideals. At any rate, I enjoy the chance meetings with Alumni and that feeling of security which the recounting of University experiences always arouses.

These meetings are numerous, for during my term at University a great number were attracted towards me who glorified the old Quaker's creed:

> "I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."

Their thoughtfulness embarrassed and annoyed me at first, for I was unable to repay them. But I met old Socrates in the Agora one day discoursing with friends. He button-holed me. We went for a walk and sat down in the shade of an olive tree overlooking the opalescent blue of the Mediterranean. We talked "On Friends," and he dispelled my fears. "What other possession is in the least comparable to a good friend?" he asked. "What horse or team of animals is so useful as a good friend; what slave is so well disposed and constant, what other possession is so utterly excellent? . . . And yet while some people will tend trees for their fruit, most of us are

lazy and careless in their attentions to that all productive property which we call a friend." I grew drowsy with the noonday heat and fell asleep. When I awoke Socrates was gone.

University is a whirling vortex of student activity, and if you are unable to survive the dizzy spin you are thrown to one side and quickly forgotten. It is Youth, mad carefree youth, in all its manysidedness standing tip-toe on the Threshold of Life. The most exacting tastes can find expression here. There are the amateur theatricals for those with histrionic ambitions; debates for those forensically inclined; student self-government for the politician; the various societies and the Faculties; athletics, rugby and soccer, basketball and baseball, swimming and tennis; the orchestra; singing and dancing. And even bridge at the Tuck Shop, a dropping-in place just off the University property, where you can buy anything from this to that, have a cup of coffee and a smoke and play the "battle of the century." The Tuck Shop saw the last stand of Calvinism when certain students set a movement on foot to stop females from indulging their appetite for the baneful weed.

I joined the University Glee Club and took a choral part in the opera Maritana.

Varsity dances are term milestones. There are four of them every year, staged by different classes or Faculties. Each class, with a stipulated amount of money to spend, vies with the others in producing

decorative effects, and sometimes you dance beneath the palms of Hawaii and sometimes in a fort in the Yukon. To enjoy one of these dances fully, you must be steeped in the traditions of the track, for each one is the Ascot of the University world; the fashion plate of society. Two or three weeks before any dance you must go down into the Rotunda of the Arts Building and indulge in a little private speculation. Here you can look the field over as they pass before you up and down the halls, and place your bid with the numerous bookies—the pari-mutuel system has not been adopted yet—standing about. You will find it difficult to break through the crowd around the bookie of "Miss Wonderful," by "Far the Best" out of "The Whole Lot." The tipster is always here, and you can pick up valuable information passing groups of prospective bidders: she's fast; takes too long going home; needs a shot to do well; how many hands does she stand?; becomes too nervous in a large field; slow to break away; sound in wind and limb. Sometimes if you are lucky you can book them straight across, but more often you have to resort to a combination. If you are backing a favorite, you can get odds two to one. But your best bet often proves to be a rank outsider from some overtown table. After two weeks of canny manipulation you can return to your studies with a full dance program. On the day of the dance you must leave your books again and fly to the barber shop to be scraped and sheared to

To restore my peace of mind I learned to write with my mouth. (p. 46)

respectability. After you have spent hours upon your toilet you pick up your delightful escort, who is considerate of your pocket and lives close to Varsity to save taxi fare, and whirl her in all her filmy, misty beauty to the dance. Here she helps you lose yourself in the madding crowd by clasping her arms about you as only woman knows how. Your spirits are maintained at intermission with a lovely chicken salad—called Haddie Pattie at those dances given on a Friday night—served from long low tables in the Gym. Here under the soft candlelight you can smoke yourself into a rapturous oblivion.

A great number of students at Alberta pay their way through College. There is, therefore, of necessity, a long summer vacation of five months in which to pad the "ol' bank account." My family felt that I could not be left in the big city too long alone, so after my first year at University they moved to Edmonton, where I spent three of these long summers doing various things. I lived much of my time in the garden, mowing the lawn, planting shrubs, digging out weeds and making new flower-beds. University had taught me to read. I saturated myself with the sentimentalism of Barrie, waddled with de Maupassant and Aldous Huxley, and then went out into the fresh air and took a good wholesome breath with Kipling; I let Carlyle shout me down, only to have my spirits revived by Douglas' South Wind. I once determined to read Charles G. Norris' "Seed," a story Thesis on Birth

Control. I went to one of the booksellers with the object of buying the book and asked the girl if she had Norris' book called "Seed" in stock. She said, "No, but we have one called 'Wheat' by Hind."

I became active in Boys' Camps operated in various parts of the Province by the Tuxis movement, and in this way saw a great many of the beauty spots of Alberta. At these camps I met such men as E. A. Corbett and Wallace Forgie, who is now carrying on boys' work in India; these men acted as a sedative for the mental upheaval my first year at University was causing.

After a camp at Jumping Pound, near Calgary, had been brought to a close, Johnny Farrel and I became Vagabonds of the Road and hitch-hiked to the mountain resort of Banff, one hundred miles away. It is strange how the magic word "hitch-hike" together with the possession of a class-pin raises bumming to the rank of vagabondage. I had read about the Romance of such a mode of travel; I found that I had been grossly deceived. It was blistering hot and the perspiration ran down my face in a hundred little rivulets. The continuous cloud of dust along the road was suffocating, and between mosquitos and blistered heels I began feeling most uncomfortable. Our experiences at hitching were not the happiest, for the Calgary Herald had warned tourists against the dangers of giving lifts, and night overtook us on the banks of the Ghost River. This was before the beauty of the valley had been

sacrificed to satisfy the demand of stockholders and its waters lashed to a rotor and whipped into white coal to pay dividends. Our optimism had induced us to travel light, and as we lay there cold and awake, under our small blanket, watching the moon and the stars, and the motor cars descending by a winding road into the valley like fire-flies, we were given ample opportunity to visualize the Ghost of Death, the smallpox, riding bareback down upon the tribe and wiping it out completely in 1870, leaving his name forever to the place. In the morning we took to the Glory Road again, and after numerous signals, we finally induced a motorist to drive us into Banff. The Methodist minister with whom we stayed thought at first we were tramps until Farrel established a social connection between his father and our prospective host. His home became our headquarters for four days. We bathed our weary bodies in the Banff Sulphur Springs. We climbed Sulphur Mountain where, even if I had been original and wanted to "spit a mile" like Richard Halliburton's friend, I could not have done it, for my mouth was parched, and I found myself panting and blowing like a steam engine in the thinner air. We found our way to Lake Louise, with its poppy-covered shore front, in the back seat of a car belonging to a chance acquaintance. I then met an undergraduate who promised to drive us back to Calgary. We walked the street of Banff till three A.M. waiting for him, and finally left in a two-

ton truck to lunge our way through the mountains all night. Our driver stopped to take a rest at daybreak, and we got out to enjoy the stillness of this hour, when everything is so quiet and the morning mist goes scurrying into the hollows from the approaching sun, and the mountains stand out, drowsily silhouetted, in deep blues, purples and vermilions. We arrived in Calgary to find that the round trip of six hundred miles had cost us a grand total of $4.92 each.

If you ever want to enjoy the beauties of nature without the accrued dislike for holiday prices, pitch your tent among the spruce beside the cold, clear spring waters of Sylvan Lake. There in the shade of God's Great Outdoor Cathedral worship the serenity in peace. And some day when the sky is clear and the lake calm take your canoe and paddle for the opposite shore; do not let the optical illusion of the mirage deceive you that it is only two hundred yards away. If you ever reach the other side draw your bark high upon the bank and hike along the road that leads to Blind Man's Valley. View the panorama from the highest point. Miles and miles of fertile fields stretch before you, varying greens and yellows under the Master paint brush. Here and there a clump of trees stands jaggedly out to relieve any possibility of monotony. Water must be somewhere, for everything is crowding down into the hollow to quench an endless thirst. But descend for yourself and make sure.

"ME"

"The fact that Mr. Watson graduated in Arts and Law is in itself sufficient indication of his courage and ability."—Dr. R. C. Wallace.

Pass into the cool shadows of the tall growth; rest awhile if you must on an old fallen tree, the victim of some thunder clash, but don't tarry too long. The beaver are waiting to entertain you below with the dull resounding slap of their big flat tails on the water, a signal of approaching danger. After admiring the engineering abilities of these animals, who work ignorant of the notoriety they have received in patriotic circles, push on. A kindly farmhouse is beyond the rise, where a cold glass of milk awaits you. In the shelter of its rude portico you will find immunity from the piracies of the average summer resort.

My nomadic wanderings were curtailed during the last two summer vacations. "Why don't you sell insurance?" Mr. Corbett suggested. The word meant nothing to me, but I was willing to do anything which would reduce the financial burden I was causing to those at home. He arranged an appointment with the manager of one of the "biggest" insurance companies. Under a sub-contract I was able to earn sufficient money to pay my fees, buy my books and clothe myself for the last two years at Varsity.

There must be some gypsy blood in me, however, for in the fall of 1928 I took the Romany Trail again as the mascot of the University rugby team. I really travelled stowaway, although the more dignified title of *moral booster* was later conferred upon me. Even a stowaway has his moments. I

never will forget how Runge, the secret of whose success upon the gridiron I now began to realize, stuffed my head forcibly beneath the pillow until a nocturnal check up had been made by the ticket collector. Nor the weary vigil I kept behind locked doors waiting for the new conductor to check off the team. I sat on the wash-room half the night. The team had a private car, and after these two preliminary heart-attacks I was able to mingle with the boys, and even venture into the diner.

If you want to round out your education by travel, do it with a winning rugby team. You not only participate in the glamour of its victories without the gore, but you feel the *esprit de corps* which makes such continuous victories possible. Our reputation had anticipated us at the University of Manitoba, and I was not able to place a bet until we were three points down. We cut down the lead, but things looked "bad". With three minutes to go Manitoba was basking in the shade of our goal posts, the wind in their favour and the ball in their possession. I was, quite naturally, gentlemen, nervous. I could see my meal ticket vanish with a field goal that would give our opponents the game. But Hess, our half-back, foresaw the play and moved over behind the sticks. Signals! Line formation! Hip! Six men streak laterally across the field and converge abruptly with the dull smack that spirals the ball into the air. They are swooping down on Hess. He's got it! He's off, his rump dropping

like a thoroughbred. He push-faces one into the dirt and dodges another. Oh boy! How that man can break his gait. He leaves them lying behind him. He has beaten them and runs the length of the field for a touchdown; a touchdown that gave us the Inter-collegiate trophy and a thrill of a life-time packed into three minutes. Pandemonium broke loose. What a touchdown! What a trophy! What a meal ticket!

I had no trouble buying my meals with the profits from the games with the University of British Columbia, for everyone thought their mud-hens would beat us on the soggy wet field. The first game was easy, although there was a lot of squawking about the running interference Runge, Shandro and McCallum did for "Tiny Tim" Timothy; he was gaining too many yards. The B.C. team gave us stiffer opposition in the second game; Dirom was plunging like a mad fool and tearing wide holes in our line. "Fast and Tricky" relieved the tension when he broke into the open by slipping through the wedge of a faked V-shaped kick formation. In the excitement I answered a reporter who asked me who it was, most uncivilly, "Runge, you fool, who else could run like that." At one point of the game U.B.C. went ahead with a touchdown. The best team always gets the breaks, and their majority was short-lived. In the following kick-off the ball floundered behind their lines. "Cokey" Shields, seeing so many wild devils coming

in on him, attempted to kick to safety, but planked the ball in the lap of Bill Siebert. Bill's prayer was at last answered, and in the final game of that memorable season he carried the pigskin over for a touch to make it the seventh straight win.

We travelled about five thousand miles. We went as far east as Winnipeg, with a stop-over at Saskatoon. The University of Saskatchewan could not have done more for us. They treated us royally with banquets and dances and delightful escorts. We were not exactly at ease under the rigorous social regime existing at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, the place where East meets West, and longed for the free life at home. We took our trophy to B.C., and showed it what is undoubtedly the finest University site in Canada; gave it a chance to spit in the Sea's Face and then brought it back to spend a winter in Alberta.

I had my first experience with Fraternities at the University of B.C., there being none at Alberta at that time. Runge, who had made me his charge for the trip, and I became guests of Alpha Kappa Alpha. Its members treated both of us like princes. We enjoyed excellent hospitality, and even had the great pleasure of meeting at a dinner in our honour Percy Williams, the Olympic champion. He later showed me his book of Autographs of all the members of the Canadian Olympic team. There was still a blank page at the end of the book, which he graciously offered for my signature, remarking that

he had "saved the last page" for me. In return for my signature I received an autographed photo of this celebrated young athlete.

Most of our time was spent on wheels. *Le nom de fou est ecrit partout*: it was only the executive ability of our manager, Roy Thorpe, whose affection for a dental drill has prevented him becoming a great Captain of Industry, that averted trouble with the railway company when the team chalked-up the steel coach. During this time we were constantly in contact with one another, and I rubbed shoulders with men possessing virility and intestinal stamina without brutality and boorishness, and culture free from an insipid aestheticism. They often gathered round a ukelele-banjo and sang lustily, asking Lindy-Lou to meet them "by the watermelon vine," and then boisterously threatening terrible things with "If I can't have you." Bridge was a common pastime and some *even* studied. On the journey through the mountains they always greeted each other by asking in a deep basso voice if there were "any bears in the canyon." My last recollection of the trip was in passing through the mountain resort of Banff in the moonlight. Standing on the vestibule of the observation car I sensed a feeling that we were flying like mad to prevent the mountains tumbling in on us; the click-a-da-click-click of the coach wheels sounding a hasty retreat the while.

All graduations at the University of Alberta are the same. They are processions of beautiful white

frocks amid a carnival of roses. It is the one day the Co-eds set apart to display their latent wisdom, and they completely predominate everything. The male sinks into insignificance. And the public conclude that even here there is no equality between the sexes. It is a day of exactness and precision; for the public have come to see how their money is spent and must be shown some physical manifestation of these master minds. An intricate machinery is set in motion to motivate the proceedings. All the participants are marshalled and mustered in one of the long stuffy halls, and after every one, to avoid confusion and mishap, has been allotted her place and she has kept herself cosmetically cool, the Convocation March commences. In the descent hundreds of students gulp at the sight of the police; which creditors do they represent? But the police are merely traffic cops holding the populace in control. In Convocation Hall the dignitaries of the University and the Potentates of the Province are there on the stage to greet you, gowned in their robes and colorful hoods of scarlet or purple or yellow. Within the Hall the Master of Ceremonies continues to exercise his undisputed right, and everyone takes her place with measured tread to the sonorous chords of the Memorial Organ. On this day the Insurance Regulations are ignored, and the hall is jammed to overflowing by hundreds of interested people; here they can, for a brief three hours, live in the atmosphere of Intellectuality with-

out the arduous work such a state involves. It is the day when the thermometer reaches its high for the month and makes it a very sweaty affair, which proves the wisdom of the roses. The long tables in the Common Room are kept in readiness and a doctor is in attendance to minister to the numerous fainting spells which might arise either from the heat or surprise. By some strange coincidence there is always some one woman who picks the Convocation Address during which to faint. The heart-felt sympathy of everyone goes out to her and away from the great peroration, delivered sometimes by a wee small man with a big voice that booms across your head into the gallery above, and brings the miscreants back to the subject with the words, "Such meticulous perfection is but the effervescence of a bubble." In all the solemnity of this holy occasion the conferring of degrees finally begins, and each graduate,

> "Struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more."

The dean of each Faculty comes forward to the footlights and calls out the names of those upon whom he believes the Chancellor should confer a degree. But education has reached the proportions of mass production, and to save time five or six proposals are on their feet at once. The endless chain continues. The dear old Chancellor, therefore, doesn't really know to whom he is conferring the degree; but he takes your hand in his and, Holy

of Holies! he remembers his Latin syntax placing the verb last, says, "*Eenae meenae minae mo*," which, being translated, means, "I really don't know who you are, but if you have remained disillusioned so far you deserve it, and I hope the world is not too unkind to you." At his side stands a committee of one acting as advisory counsel. This personage places the hood over your head. Even he is doubtful who you really are, but this the public must never know. He gives you a long green cylindrical box, supposedly containing your degree, and you are asked to go to the General Office where a clerk goes to the trouble to find your parchment, and charges you ten dollars for doing so.

As I turned to descend from the stage with my heart continuing its relentless boom-boom-boom, with the blood beating against my temples, and the noise of the applause ringing in my ears, a daze crossed my eyes. But out of that sea of faces before me I saw one with its dimmed blue eyes still smiling. My composure returned with that look that could span continents; although this was no time to do so, I smiled back. Both of us had won our degree.

Thirteen cards are too many for stubby toes to hold. (p. 80)

Chapter VI.

THE LEAN YEARS.

All Universities have within their walls thousands of little Napoleons ready to go out and conquer the world. These little men enter business with that cock-on-the-straw-stack spirit, only to find the foundation pitch-forked from under them. I was no exception. I came out feeling that most of my real work was done and I could now capitalize upon my knowledge. I found to my utter amazement that nobody really wanted it; that most of the business men I met had been through a more valuable University, that of Personal Experience, and could even "tell me," another young upstart out to resurrect the world.

I threw my boyish enthusiasm into the Insurance Game. Here it must take brains to become a high-powered insurance executive, I thought, for the public seemed to be willing to pay a huge sum for his services; $100,000.00 a year, or more, was not too much to pay such a person. I looked forward to the time when I would be content with such an amount so long as I were able to pursue my hobby, while my vice-robot did the office work for me. Here at least a person's worth was appreciated much more, monetarily, than in the political or industrial field of endeavor.

I submerged my individuality and became a

member of the "Great Family," which our company was wont to call itself. But I turned out to be somewhat of an erring son—a bit radical on certain subjects close to the family's heart. At any rate I did not prove a very successful Insurance Agent. The reasons were two. First, my sympathy complex. I presumed that many people bought from me out of sympathy; although this presumption was often unjustified, my field of approach was thereby cut down, likewise my income. Secondly, I couldn't take the selling end of it, the toying with life and death, seriously. Many agents, poor souls, couldn't see the funny side of it, and probably never will—for example:

I was taught the psychology of selling: "a series of mental steps through which the prospective customer must be taken before the sale is consummated"; how to introduce myself and create his interest by holding his attention to the point of resolving to "get it now." With the inculcation of these principles I went forth with my little bag of tricks. From it I could supply every need; a life policy, a death policy, an annuity policy, and a disability policy. I was able to provide against living too long or dying too soon. I was taught to inveigle some one to listen to me by telling him I had come to sell "nothing but an idea.". I would then, after making him a paying member of the family, return to headquarters for a portion of the spoils with a promise of more for the next five or six years if the paying member would be considerate enough

to live and pay that long. My commission corresponded to the size of the premium on each policy, and the thought of it often determined the prospect's needs. Although it was positively illegal to quote dividends, I often induced him to "sign here" by sedulously hinting at the tremendous profits his investment would draw if our dividend scale continued to pay in the future what it had done in the past; I honestly believed it would.

One of the biggest troubles was to find this customer or prospect. I was shown how to build up a large connection by joining clubs, going to dances, taking part in sport and generally interesting myself in the community even to the point of fostering acquaintances on the street car. Every person was a living prospect. After meeting him I filed him away with any information I had gathered. This was to be used in a future canvass. The system was guaranteed never to fail. I would go home and tell Annie Macnish of the millions I was going to make with it, and she would say, "Michty, boy, content yer-r-sel with a livin."

The selling end of the insurance business has reached overbalancing proportions, and a tremendous machinery has been created, by all private companies, to meet the competitive stress. Lectures are continually being given to the agents upon the science and art of selling. Our "Pep Rally" generally came on Saturday mornings, but unfortunately Saturday night was my "bath nicht," and I

lost all my chocolate-coated inspiration. Others experienced the same loss of "Pep," so the rallies were changed to Mondays to give us a shove off for the week. And to make sure that this was sustained we took part in contests and received little prizes of silver and gold for the highest volume; these games were entered into, even by some of the older married members, with zest, and they delighted in the sport of competition. In order to keep our viewpoint broadened we were entertained at banquets (these have become less since the stock crash), at which wise men from the East gave us gifts of trite sayings and inspiring addresses. These men were presumed to be wise, that is, if heredity is to be believed; for a bond of consanguinity or a marriage tie often existed between them and the "big shots" of the company. From one of these men I began to appreciate the ups and downs of insurance. "Gentlemen," he said, "you must raise your horizons for the coming year and go down into the mine and dig for its treasures of hidden gold." And a lot more twaddle and bally-hoo.

I was connected with this Insurance Company for two years. I came to realize the absolute necessity of life insurance. In fact, with the increasing hazards of life it becomes indispensable to the modern man since all his wages are used in living from day to day. The only way to provide against these emergencies is to spread the risk among millions. This universal need takes insurance out of

My toes first realized their importance when they cut the down of youth from a boyish face. (p. 80)

the field of private business. It has become a state affair. The state can and should make it possible, in spite of the "subtle and pernicious" opposition of the private companies, for the working man to get his insurance much more cheaply. There is no reason why, eliminating the tremendous overhead and the operating expenses of so many companies, the State could not do this; for the interest from the investment of the capital amount would easily pay the cost of management and administration and still leave some to be added to the principal. The sooner people come to realize this the better it will be for the widows and orphans, the old and the maimed, the crippled and the disabled. By bringing the value of the policy within the scope of the average purse the appalling percentage of lapses would be greatly reduced.

My sales fell off according as these beliefs grew, and the time came when I was not even earning a living; this people never knew, for every agent affects a perpetual state of prosperity and optimism. My father's death made the need of money staringly apparent. I attempted to overcome one of the obstacles to my success, that of being unable to illustrate to a prospect the figures and tables necessary in a canvass. I had a complete sales canvass developed to the point where the prospect, by filling in certain words in different squares of a block design on paper, was carried along progressively to a decision of either taking or rejecting the plan. I sooth-

ed my troubled conscience by selling only investment endowment policies, which a certain class of people were desirous of having. I was able by this means to increase my earnings a little, and even won a silver platter in one of the idiotic sales contests. But I had primarily entered insurance with my eye on the legal department at the Head Office of the company. When I learned from one of our eastern representatives, who knew nothing of, and whose opinion was not affected by, my abilities as an agent, that a man with my physical condition would never receive a position there, I was forced to change my plans. I saw a field open for an adviser of estates, which in itself necessitated a legal training; I determined to put in my articles and be admitted to the Bar. I resigned in the spring of 1931.

In attempting to find a place to serve my articles I was imbued with one consideration; to find some firm that would pay me for my services. This would have been no easy task in the best of times for one under my handicap, but, by a stroke of good luck, I did believe I had placed myself. It was only to be a matter of a short time, I was assured, before the position would be made final. Finally, however, the appointment was vetoed by one who believed that I would "embarrass" his employees. I went out for a count of ten. After I came to I interviewed the Premier of the Province regarding a position in the Civil Service. He was

most sympathetic, but conditions did not permit an addition to the staff at that time; he promised to place me as soon as possible.

What was I to do then? Was there anything I really could do? These two questions beset me immediately. I tried to interest myself in selling magazines. I was no success; friends wondered at this, for I knew so many people. I then turned to Radio, and those operating the Radio Station at the University of Alberta were most decent in giving me a course in announcing, and my voice went out to that great number of people its extension lectures reach. After the course was completed I applied to a commercial station—my application is still "on file." I later became an Aluminium salesman, or, more correctly, a *social convenor*. My duty was to arrange gatherings at which the ware was demonstrated by giving the guests a waterless-cooked dinner. After lulling them to satisfaction with a sumptuous repast, appointments were made with each guest at which it was hoped the goods would be sold. I soon abandoned this means of livelihood.

The more I learned of the Fraternity of Salesmen the more disgusted I became with the racket. There are many quacks among them; everyone has his "gag" to put the thing he is selling "across." Some magazine agents give the magazine away for nothing provided the recipient will pay the postage in advance. Some washing machine salesmen carry oil in secret pockets to whiten the clothes and create

suds when the lady is not looking. Some aluminum salesmen salt potatoes and sugar beets which are passed off as "natural flavor" vegetables. Many insurance salesmen will use selling methods ranging from cajolery to supplication to get the policy and "bag" the commission. You will always find certain members of all these rackets who glory in "kidding the public" or "pulling a fast one" on some poor gullible soul.

This period of doubt and uncertainty was very trying upon Annie Macnish, and I am sure she spent many sleepless nights pondering the outcome. I once asked her to teach me how to balance a budget, and she conferred upon me the title of Vice-Chancellor and Lord-Keeper of the Bedrooms and Custodian of the Hoover. Since that time we have both worked towards a common end, I with my household duties and she with hers.

For the past three years there has grown out of me another self. I dubbed him "Old Troll." He possessed the most pictorial mind, and often left me weak with excitement as he told me his romantic tales. It was he who promised the millions I would make selling insurance, and he carried me into the Head Office of the company as one of its chief executives, quite inconsistently ignoring the fact that I was not becoming such a good insurance salesman. He used to take me up into the agent's office and dawdle away my time telling me how much all the prospect cards in my file meant to me

and how unnecessary it was to go to the trouble of canvassing these people really to find out; canvassing was the nemesis of the average insurance agent, anyway, and stalked him like a ghost if it were permitted to do so. He then took me into the Stock Exchange and showed me how to make a fortune with a little piece of chalk. After he had lost me a "mere couple of hundred" he said it was the work of Providence, for I really was not cut out to be a broker. I could not help exclaiming to him, at this, the celebrated expression of Peer Gynt, "Ah, God is a Father to me after all; but economical he certainly is not." Old Troll cunningly seduced me into believing that my real success was as an Adviser of Estates, and he drew lurid pictures of a large patronage coming to the grandest offices where an army of stenographers and accountants cared for them. He even placed me in a cylindrical office with no doors, where everything was handled by the magic touch of a button. He grew jealous of any actual and real contacts I made, and kept me his friend by making me believe that selling was not in my field, since people only bought things from me out of sympathy. This completely won me, and we used to tipple ourselves into a state of blissful unconcern and forgetfulness. Annie Macnish used to wonder where we were, and turned down the bed hoping we would not be too long. The longer we knew each other the more frightened of him I became; I feared he would soon completely consume

me. Lingering in a state of romantic illusions was getting me nowhere. So I said to him:

" 'Why, then, do I but dream . . .;
Like one that stands upon a promontory,
And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
Wishing his foot were equal with his eye;
And chides the sea that sunders him from thence,
Saying, he'll lade it dry to have his way.'."

But Old Troll replied, " 'Life would be quite tolerable if we could only get rid of these confounded duns that keep pestering us in our poverty.' We are really no good here. Misfortune

' . . did corrupt frail nature with some bribe,
To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub;
To disproportion me in every part,
Like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp
That carries no impression like the dam.
O monstrous fault! to harbour such a thought.'

Lowell was not thinking of us, you know, when he wrote, 'No man is born into this world whose work is not born with him. There is always work . . . for those who will.' If you feel you must help Annie Macnish, what about your Insurance Policy? It has reached the stage of Indisputability. Let us leave poverty and concern behind us and seek the land of Everlasting Happiness. Why not? Some Romans and Greeks did not consider it a crime, and even our own countryman Hume says, 'Suppose it is no longer in my power to promote the interest of society; suppose that I am a burden to it; suppose that my life hinders some person from being much more useful to society, in such cases my resignation of life must not only be innocent but

laudable.' What use are we to society? Let's be off!"

"No, no, Old Troll," I shrieked. "The insurance money I might leave would last no time; and a man of high character like Napoleon refused this means of escape from pain and sorrow. I'll show you what I can do. This is where you and I part company for good."

I rushed out into the night and searched for a rainstorm. Instead I found a Heaven studded with stars.

"A star looks down at me,
And says: 'Here I and you
Stand, each in our degree;
What do you mean to do,—
Mean to do?'

I say: 'For all I know,
Wait, and let Time go by,
Till my change come.'—'Just so,'
The star says: 'So mean I:—
So mean I'."

I commenced to "laugh" and then began to "sing".

Chapter VII.

RECOMPENSE.

A little Welshman passed my way and said, "Good voice." I visited his upstairs studio some time later and asked him if that meant it had possibilities. All he said was, "Oh, yes." But these four words meant more than diamonds to me, for they came from one who was sincere in what he said and knew of what he spoke; a person who is beyond the shadow of a doubt one of the finest authorities on voice production in Western Canada. He subsequently expressed himself more fully in writing:

> "Mr. Watson . . . has a very pleasing tenor voice, to which is added a happy disposition, which shows itself in all he does. I am quite confident that his singing, which he invests with intellectual and inspirational qualities, will carry him far into the musical world, and make him a favorite with the general public."

I confided "My Desire" to him and explained the financial barrier which stood in the way. I will never forget his reaction. I had reached the foot of the stairs when I turned to the sound of his voice. "Come back and I will give you all the help I can," he said. I left the building, a wooden structure, with its peculiar frieze and its strange parapet, making a last valiant stand in a district of brick and mortar. A new avenue opened before me.

Here was a way out; I would become a singer, a vocation in which I could be independent.

Since that day I have been in daily contact with this artist, Mr. W. J. Hendra. We started working together about two months before the Alberta Musical Festival. At one of my lessons he advised me to get the Festival numbers. I protested; but he won the day with the argument that it would be good experience and good training. It was. In the days that followed I began to appreciate his real sense of interpretation.

Nervousness was the order of things as the Festival drew near. My anxiety was heightened by being wedged between two other competitors from the same school of expression. I decided to change the required order of singing the songs. This strategy proved successful, for I was able to get the advantage of the original key as opposed to a transposed version of the previous singer; and to regain my composure for, what was to me, the heavier and more difficult number. Annie Macnish was not so sure of this *coup d'état*, and won the competition with the potion of clarity she gave me before leaving home on that eventful morning; but I downed her "white of egg and lemon" under protest. She also knew of "My Desire" and, so great was her Scotch reserve, made the victory doubly certain by kissing me good-bye. She was unable to be among those present, for the dinner had to be attended to.

The competition was held in a large Church at a time of day when even the great Chaliapin, so the anecdote runs, finds it difficult to "spit". Many people were there to hear the competitors, and I quaked in my shoes as I took the stage; but it was most reassuring to see the adjudicator, Mr. H. Plunkett Green, of London, England, rest his head in his hands and "just listen" after I had sung the first few bars. With the completion of the first song I found my mouth parched and it felt all swollen. My nervousness had not shown itself in my voice, although I was thankful I was not wearing a kilt, for my knees shook like a stimulated jelly. Before I began my second number I received a signal from my sister which made my heart sink. It was similar to that used by the conductor in the Edmonton Male Chorus when we were going flat; but I learned later that all she wanted me to do was make the song light and airy. The tenseness of two months broke when Mr. Green gave me the award with, what proved to be, one of the highest marks in the vocal classes of the Festival. He made these remarks:

> "This singer sings from within, has imagination and a sense of shape. His words mean what they say to him and he tells us."

The news reached home before me, and I turned our corner to see Annie Macnish out in the street waving me her congratulations.

The class I won is generally known as the Gold

Medal Class, but the Festival Committee emulated the worthy example of the British Government and went off the Gold Standard this year. That week I was presented with my certificate.

The question of finances for further study immediately arose. It was suggested to me that perhaps you might be interested in knowing many of the things which you have just read, so the book was started. But I had my doubts about my ability as an author, and it was only the pledge I gave to a Customs Officer, years ago, that kept me going. You see, I had difficulty in getting into Canada. The Customs Officer feared I would become a charge upon the State. I assured him I would some day be able to earn my own living; although I remember he felt rather inclined to discount the whole matter. I hope you and all your friends will help me prove that the Customs Officer was wrong.

It was a huffy indigestion of a University Professor that quashed my aspirations to authorship. The Edmonton Male Chorus, fearing that all publishers suffered from this same type of indigestion, took the matter out of their hands to place the book in yours. This organization advanced the money to publish it.

You would not be surprised at this magnificent gesture if you knew the simple greatness of this body of fifty members. They meet together once a week to foster the love of music. You need only

affiliate yourself with them, all Craftsmen, to appreciate with Carlyle:

> "Two men I honour, and no third. First, the toilworn Craftsman that with earth-made Implement laboriously conquers the Earth, and makes her man's. Venerable to me is the hard Hand; crooked, coarse; wherein notwithstanding lies a cunning virtue, indefeasibly royal, as of the Sceptre of this Planet. Venerable too is the rugged face, all weather-tanned, bespoiled, with its rude intelligence; for it is the face of a Man living manlike. O, but the more venerable for thy rudeness. . . . Yet toil on, toil on; thou art in thy duty, be out of it who may; thou toilest for the altogether indispensable, for daily bread."

I received a letter from the Secretary which reads in part: "I wish to advise you that at the general meeting held on Wednesday evening . . . it was moved, seconded and carried unanimously, that an amount . . . be loaned you without interest . . . and I therefore have pleasure in enclosing herewith a cheque for this amount."

After receiving the loan of the money I began to write "My Desire" in earnest, filled with a determination to justify the faith of these men in me. *Possunt quia posse videntur*: success comes to those who are resolved to succeed.

Chapter VIII.

MY DESIRE.

I only remember wanting the use of my arms once. This followed an insult I received in the school playground at Macleod. I wanted to avenge myself the British way. Instead I hurled my body at my opponent and drove him to the ground. The rest was easy. Once down I could get at him with my feet. I was in the act of kicking him to nothing when friends separated us.

The inability to use my arms has made it very difficult to adapt myself to a world the inventions of which are made for those who can use their hands. I fear that, if I had the power, life would be one continuous procession of swing doors, all electrical fixtures would be controlled from the floor, clothes would have no buttons, suits would have three pairs of trousers with reinforced seats.

This process of adaptation was very gradual. From the outset I laboured under physical shortcomings. It took years for my toes to grow large enough to do much. But the muscles, X, Y and Z, in my feet developed to an astonishing degree. My toes through time became very strong and capable of a great many things. Nothing is too difficult for them to try, and they will lift sacks of flour, paint floors, turn locks and undo knots. It was a happy day for them when they were able to sit up

at table with the rest of the family. They realized their importance when they cut the down of Youth from a boyish face. They can pinch you like a crab, and make people say the most unexpected things. One surprised Doctor constantly reiterated the same exclamation, "Well, I'll be damned!" to every new thing these toes did for him. They can get more laughs than many a highly paid comedian, so that, with their first debut in pictures, they do not wonder at your surprise, astonishment and amusement at what they can do. Now that they have come out in the world their vanity is appalling, and they strut like a peacock when people say they are part of "the most perfect feet ever seen".

The mental readjustment to conditions was slow; it was all self-taught. It was I who decided to sit on the floor in Grade II; to have a floor desk there, and finally, years later, to shelve my books in front of me. At University I had to work out my own salvation, as in so many other cases. When bridge became the vogue I fitted myself into the ordinary bridge game by having a ledge built to hook on the bridge table; in this ledge I place my cards, for thirteen cards are too many and too large for stubby toes to hold. When I am dummy the ledge sits on the table facing my partner. I have also devised a convenience for the telephone. It consists of an artificial arm which holds a receiver of its own. I merely raise the customary receiver and dial the number with some

pointed object, held either between my toes or in my mouth. Most of the electrical fixtures in our home are worked from a wall bracket or a pull chain. And so I could go on telling you a great many ways to make it easier for those who are physically handicapped. But, although I must have profited by it in the long run, this trial and error system is too arduous and extends over a long period of time.

You must be wondering why all this outburst savouring suspiciously of propaganda. You need wait no longer for the answer. Your patience is to be rewarded here and now. For the point I have been leading up to is this: that Canada should have special institutions (let us call them Vocational Training Schools for want of a better name) at which, because of the accumulated experience of many cases and the presence of an expert teaching staff, the crippled child could be taught in a few months what it would take him a lifetime to learn by himself. In other words, if we must be technical, he would be taught to readjust himself to his environment.

I thought I had completely adjusted myself to modern society until the employer, whom I previously told you about, remarked that my condition would embarrass his employees. This remark changed my whole career. My immediate reaction was to wonder how other cripples without my education could ever survive. "These are the unhappy

persons who, in the great lottery of life, have drawn a blank."

Unfortunately all crippled children are not lucky enough to have an Annie Macnish to bring them up normally. Sentimentality and pity on the part of the parent often lead to indolence and ignorance in the child. And these two characteristics are of little use in offsetting such a rebuff as the one recounted above. The proper mental outlook is of the utmost importance. These special institutions could, therefore, play the part of the sane parent to every crippled child and help him readjust himself to his surroundings.

That once done the next step would be to teach him some vocation whereby he could be kept profitably busy. For I learned during the lean years that one must be financially independent in his own right if he is to retain his morale.

The practicability of the scheme is unquestionable. There are at least 25,000 crippled children who could benefit by these schools; most of them live in the large urban centres of the Dominion. The absence of the schools, therefore, is certainly not because they are not needed. Let me quote you part of a letter one of Canada's leading orthopaedic surgeons wrote to me.

"I believe that there exists a field for most useful work in establishing the proper machinery to help the cripple to re-establish himself. It is most important that these people should get in some useful type of occupation so that they may become

self-supporting. It not only makes better citizens of them, but also lifts their morale so that they may take a proper view of life."

Can you wonder then, with all these thoughts surging through my mind, that I would want to dedicate my life to the cause of the handicapped child. But here again, as has happened so often during the last eighty pages, my toes absolutely refuse to move freely on any subject about themselves. I think they are impeded by the amount of Annie Macnish's reserve they have inherited. Very difficult, and rather poor taste too, they say, to be continually talking about ones self. So they asked the President of the University of Alberta, Dr. R. C. Wallace, to do it for them.

> "Mr. William R. Watson has discussed with me his proposal to devote his energies to helping others who are like himself disabled. He was able to adapt himself to University conditions in a marvellous way, and he used his feet almost in place of hands in the matter of note-taking and otherwise. The fact that he graduated in Arts and Law is in itself sufficient indication of his courage and ability. He feels that there is a possibility in his making easier the conditions for other people like himself. I feel personally that this proposal should be explored in a very sympathetic manner, and that anything that can be done to encourage and assist him towards a practical method of working out his plan should be done for the sake of those whom he wishes to help."

Now you must wish me "Bon Voyage," and pray that the Muse of Music will be kind, and give me a voice of sufficient quality and strength to

carry me up and down the country on my Cripple Crusade, the result of which may spare thousands of mothers the anxiety and heartaches of one little woman I know.

Here is where you come into importance. Just glance, casual like, over your shoulder, to make sure nobody is listening, before I confide this last great thing to you. It was "Old Troll" who created this vision; but you know how contented he was to leave things in the dream stage. Now that you have the "King's Ear" in his place, it rests with you to make the scheme an actuality. Of course you can play an important part in bettering conditions by ridding yourself of any maudlin sentimentality on this topic of deformity. And who knows what child your wholesome attitude will spare. Your new outlook may even claim some credit in erasing the stigma of Lord Byron's vehement utterance engendered by the corroding bitterness of his own deformity.

"I have not loved the world, nor the world, me;
. . . . in the crowd
They could not deem me one of such; I stood
Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
Of thoughts which were not their thoughts,—
* * * *
But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be
Words which are things,—hopes which will not deceive,
And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
Snares for the failing; . . . . . .
That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

After you finish what remains, get in touch with me, if you have any ideas you'd like to give

Good–bye for the now.

away. You will find me "at home" week days, except Saturday (my "bath nicht," you remember). If you find it too rainy to come yourself, drop a letter into the mail-box at the corner, and I assure you it will be treated courteously. Do not be afraid to send it along alone; Annie Macnish will be here to keep everything in proper order. I am eagerly looking forward to what you have to suggest. I know it will help make the dream come true more quickly.

With your parcel of information tucked away under my right arm, which has a providential bow in it for such great occasions as these, I hope some day to be instrumental in setting afoot a movement to establish Vocational Training Schools in Canada for Handicapped Children, that they may be better able to readjust themselves to their environment and become independent citizens in their community. *This* is My Desire.

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